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Excellence, Accessibility, Responsibility: Report of the Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Post Secondary Education

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In July 1996, the Minister of Education appointed the Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Postsecondary Education in Ontario and released a discussion paper, *Future Goals for Ontario Colleges and Universities*. The panel, chaired by David C. Smith, principal emeritus of Queen's University, addressed three questions:

- What is the most appropriate way to share costs among students, the private sector and government?
- Are there better ways to promote and support cooperation between and among colleges, universities and the secondary school system?
- How can we best meet the expected levels of demand for post-secondary education?

The Advisory Panel's report to the Minister, released in December 1996, makes 18 detailed recommendations. It also charts a basic direction for the postsecondary system in Ontario, with four major elements:

- differentiation in strengths among all colleges and universities;
- a less regulated environment, which remains accountable to the public;
- the performance of different institutions to be assessed against relevant benchmarks; and
- adequacy of resources available to the system, including an increase in the level of resources available to the publicly-funded system.

Funding

The report's major recommendation on government funding (#2) is that it should be stabilized immediately and increased over several years to a level comparable with other provinces and with government support of public institutions in the U.S. For universities, Ontario presently provides 68% of average per capita funding in the other nine provinces, and 73% of average funding in 11 comparable states; so this in effect recommends a major increase in government funding of the system. The panel endorses the present "corridor" public funding of universities (under which universities receive a fixed share of grants within a specified band of enrollment, rather than a strict per capita grant system). It recommends that this system also be used to fund colleges (#3, #4).

Regarding student contributions to post-secondary education, it recommends that institutions be free to set tuition fees, but that the government would set a maximum level that it will take into account for

calculating student assistance. In addition, 30% of any fees above the maximum level should be set aside and then distributed by the institution as needs-based student assistance; and compulsory ancillary fees set by the institution should be treated as tuition fees (#6). To help students and their families finance their studies, it recommends an income-contingent loan repayment plan, as well as some changes to the tax system (deductibility of interest payments from income in calculating income tax and comparable treatment of RESPs and RRSPs) (#7).

Regarding private sector contributions, it recommends that all donations of assets should be exempt from capital gains tax (#8). It also recommends that colleges explore the possibilities of private and international training programs, and that all institutions develop partnerships in education and research with private institutions (#9).

Coordination

The panel recommends that government-defined catchment areas for colleges be abandoned (#10). It also recommends that credit transfer and cooperative education between colleges and universities should be encouraged by government and assessed by the advisory body described below (#11). It recommends that an Ontario College Diploma, to be granted by Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, be developed, and that only universities should be allowed to grant degrees (#12).

Advisory Body

The panel believes an advisory body should be created by the government to provide sustained, arm's-length analysis of the postsecondary system, improve information on the system, report on its comparative strengths and weaknesses, and assess the quality assurance and accountability systems of the province's colleges and universities (#13). The report discusses how such a body should improve coordination and quality, not regulate the postsecondary system (pp. 46-48).

Future Needs

Regarding levels of demand for postsecondary education, the panel recommends an expansion of the geographical reach of programs, through partnerships with other institutions and more intensive use of existing physical facilities, rather than building a new college or university (#14).

Faculty

The panel recommends the establishment of a special matching trust fund for faculty renewal, to hire and retain outstanding scholars at universities, and allow academic development for college faculty (#15). It also recommends that compensation increases should recognize excellence in teaching and, at universities, research performance (#16); and that processes should exist to evaluate faculty and respond to unsatisfactory performance (#17, and p. 55). The panel specifically advises against abolishing tenure, in its discussion of the latter recommendation.

Research

The panel called for the government's funding for research to be more than quadrupled (from \$23 million to \$100 million), and for the government to develop a research policy (#5).¹

Private Universities

The recommendation that has probably received the most press attention is the panel's qualified approval for establishing private, not-for-profit institutions.² The panel recommends that the province amend legislation to permit the establishment of such an institution, "under strict conditions," including mission and governance, academic quality and financial responsibility (#18).

¹ This parallels the recommendations of the Cloutier Report in Alberta, which is mentioned by the panel. For more detail, see B-4, Post Secondary Education Reforms in Other Provinces.

² Jennifer Lewington, "Panel opens door to private universities," *Globe and Mail*, 17 December 1996, p. A1.

